

**PROVERBS SERIES SEVENTEEN  
ON PROFITING FROM CRITICISM**

**Dr. Roger Barrier**

**Proverbs 1:1-5;2:1-5;12:1,15;13:14,18;17:10;29:1**

- SLIDE #: “Honest criticism is hard to take, particularly from a relative, a friend, an acquaintance, or a stranger.”

That is just about everybody!

- SLIDE #: How many of you enjoy being criticized?

No one enjoys it; but Proverbs teaches that good criticism is one of the best things that can happen to us.

- SLIDE #: Proverb 12:1 declares: “Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates correction is stupid.”

Since criticism is hard to handle, mentally, emotionally and physically, we want to learn how to handle it well—

- SLIDE #: like David handled it when Nathan confronted him over his sin of adultery with Bathsheba and subsequent murder of her husband, Uriah.

- SLIDE #: David broke—wrote two psalms 32 and 53.

- SLIDE #: But, what if our critics are wrong?

Once, while he was preaching, John Wesley noticed a lady in the audience who was known for her critical attitude. All through the service she sat and stared at his new tie.

When the meeting ended, she came up to him and said very sharply, “Mr. Wesley, the strings on your bow tie are much too long. It’s an offense to me!”

He asked if any of the ladies present happened to have a pair of scissors. When the scissors were handed to him, he gave them to the critic and asked her to trim the streamers to her liking. After she clipped them off near the collar, he said, “Are you sure they’re all right now?” “Yes, that’s much better.”

“Then let me have those shears for a moment,” said Wesley. “I’m sure you wouldn’t mind if I gave you a bit of correction. I don’t want to be cruel, but I must tell you, madam, that your tongue is an offense to me – it’s too long! Please stick it out; I’d like to take some off!”

This morning, in our study of Proverbial wisdom, we will engage with some of the many proverbs which guide us in the proper handling of—and profiting from—criticism.

- SLIDE #: THE RIGHT ATTITUDE then the right response.

- SLIDE #: NO ONE KNOWS EVERYTHING; SO, DON’T BE A “KNOW IT ALL.”

- SLIDE #: Prov 29:1: A man who remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed — without remedy.

- SLIDE #: NO ONE KNOWS EVERYTHING; SO, DEVELOP A YEARNING HEART TO LEARN.

- SLIDE #: Prov 2:1-5: My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you,

2 turning your ear to wisdom  
and applying your heart to understanding,  
3 and if you call out for insight  
and cry aloud for understanding,  
•SLIDE #: 4 and if you look for it as for silver  
and search for it as for hidden treasure,  
5 then you will understand the fear of the LORD  
and find the knowledge of God.

I am afraid some of us have become like the group of folks in a little tribe who lived long ago and far away in a valley.

In that valley the grass was green; the river was clear; the game was plentiful; and they grew and they prospered and they multiplied until that valley was no longer abundant enough for them.

There was a group of men in that tribe that rose up to say, “We’ve heard on the other side of the mountain where people have never been before, there’s a broader valley, greener grass, deeper stream, more abundant game. We want to see.” So they went over and saw, and they came back and said, “It’s so. It’s like they told us.”

You know what? There was a council in that village, called the Council of the Men Who Know. That Council said, “There just can’t be anywhere like that. We know there’s not.”

So those who knew stayed there until nearly everyone had died, but those pioneers and their families struggled over the mountain, and within another generation the same thing had happened.

The pioneers had grown and prospered and multiplied so that game was not plentiful enough; that water was not deep enough; that grass was not abundant enough. So another group of heroes rose up and said, “We’ve heard that beyond the next mountain where men have never gone before there is an even yet wider valley and more abundant water.

But you know what happened in the interim? Those original pioneers had become the Council of the Men Who Know.

When I look at life, I want to ask the Father never let me join the Council of the Men Who Know that there’s not something on the other side of the mountain.

•SLIDE #: NO ONE IS PERFECT, SO WELCOME REBUKE, EVEN IF IT STINGS.

•SLIDE #: Prov 17:10: A rebuke impresses a man of discernment more than a hundred lashes a fool.

Preparing for leadership meeting; Mike: That approach makes me think you have abandoned all leadership what so ever. Contradicted yourself. Do that in a business setting, you’d be fired.”

He was right.

•SLIDE #: PEOPLE HAVE DIFFERENT PRIORITIES AND EXPECTATIONS; SO EVALUATE CRITICISM IN LIGHT OF YOUR PURPOSES AND CALLING IN LIFE.

•SLIDE #: Prov 1:1-5: The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:

2 for attaining wisdom and discipline;

for understanding words of insight;

3 for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life,  
doing what is right and just and fair;

•SLIDE #: 4 for giving prudence to the simple,  
knowledge and discretion to the young —

5 let the wise listen and add to their learning,  
and let the discerning get guidance —

Preaching priority  
Saturday nights priority  
Family priority: “come teach the word to us.”

Relocation Priority  
Tom Machamer pointing at my chest: “You are destroying this church. You are leading it right over the precipice to destruction.”

•SLIDE #: CONSIDER THE SOURCE. SOME PEOPLE CAN’T BE SATISFIED; SOME CRITICISMS AREN’T WORTH ENGAGING; SOME PEOPLE AREN’T WORTH LISTENING TO.

Mother-in-law pleased with the service. I am so glad. No, you don’t understand, you have pleased the unpleasable.

A woman left her house and went down to the plaza to do her errands. To her disgust, she found every shop malodorous. “Phew,” she said to the clerk in the grocery store, “it stinks in here.” Going next door to the dry cleaners, she frowned at the odor. She stepped into the bank to make a deposit, and found a sewer-like smell, which she complained about while she cashed a small check.  
Returning home, she discovered she had doggy poo on her shoe.

•SLIDE #: Proverb 26:7: Like a lame man's legs that hang limp is a proverb in the mouth of a fool.

A farmer came into town and asked the owner of a restaurant if he would like to buy some frog legs. “How many you got?” the owner of the restaurant asked.  
The farmer answered, “At least one thousand. There is a pond near my house that is full of frogs. They croak night and day and are about to drive me crazy.”  
The two men settled on a price, and agreed that the farmer would deliver the first one hundred frogs the following week. Seven days later the farmer returned, looking rather sheepish, with two scrawny frogs.  
He told the owner of the restaurant, “I was mistaken. There were only these two frogs in that whole pond. But they sure were making a lot of noise.”

### THE RIGHT RESPONSE

•SLIDE #: 1. Stop and look at the person. Criticism is serious business.

•SLIDE #: Prov 13:14: The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life, turning a man from the snares of death.

•SLIDE #: 2. Listen to what they have to say. Don’t answer too quickly.

•SLIDE #: Prov 18:13: He who answers before listening — that is his folly and his shame.

Don’t be planning your response before you have heard what they have to say.

A U.S. cavalry commander was conferencing with an important Indian chief. Working through a translator, he asked the chief a number of questions and was surprised to get no reply. After the meeting, the commander asked the translator why he had gotten no response. The translator replied, “That’s what we call Indian time. He has enough respect for your questions to go away and think about them before answering them.” Maybe we all need to practice more Indian time.

•SLIDE #: 3. Not everyone sees from the same perspective. Accept their perception as real and valid.

•SLIDE #: Prov 12:15: The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice.

A mother once described how her three children would respond to a spider web in the garden. The first child would examine the web and wonder how the spider wove it. The second would worry a great deal about where the spider was. And the third would exclaim, “Oh, look! A trampoline!” There was only one spider web in the garden, only one reality. But how differently it can be perceived and understood.

•SLIDE #: 4. Resist the temptation to defend. Don’t accuse or use labels.

•SLIDE #: Prov 23:9: Do not speak to a fool, for he will scorn the wisdom of your words.

•SLIDE #: 5. Don’t act like a fool by changing the subject or joking.

•SLIDE #: Prov 10:8: The wise in heart accept commands, but a chattering fool comes to ruin.

•SLIDE #: 6. Seek to understand what they really meant—and said. Restate their feelings in your own words to ensure that you both are talking about the same thing.

•SLIDE #: Prov 16:21: The wise in heart are called discerning, and pleasant words promote instruction.

•SLIDE #: 7. Let your wisdom show. Respond appropriately.

You can do this wrong.

A father and his son took a donkey to the market. The man sat on the beast and the boy walked. People along the way said, “What a terrible thing, a big strong fellow sitting on the donkey’s back while the youngster has to walk.”

So the father dismounted and the son took his place. Soon onlookers remarked, “How terrible, this man walking and the little boy sitting.”

At that, they both got on the donkey’s back—only to hear others say, “How cruel, two people riding on that poor donkey.” Off they came.

But other complained, “How crazy, the donkey carrying nothing and two people walking.”

So they picked up the donkey and tried to carry it. They never did make it to the market.

- SLIDE #: 7a. Humility and gratitude
- SLIDE #: 7b. Apology if appropriate
- SLIDE #: 7c. Evaluation: If the criticism is true, make changes accordingly..
- SLIDE #: Prov 13:18: He who ignores discipline comes to poverty and shame, but whoever heeds correction is honored.

If the criticism is not true, ignore it

Story of lady hearing from God: “Not spent enough time with you wife, You will be divorced” (Julie disguising your voice? No).

Truth: not spent enough time with Julie.

Al Johnson: “Was there any message of hope and repentance?” No. “Then, it was not from God.”

•SLIDE #: A WORD TO CRITICS

Poem: The Critic

•SLIDE #: A little seed lay on the ground,  
 And soon began to sprout.  
 “Now which of all the flowers around.”  
 It mused, “shall I come out?  
 The lily’s face is fair and proud,  
 But just a trifle cold;  
 The rose, I think, is rather loud,  
 And then, it’s fashion’s old.

•SLIDE #: The violet is all very well,  
 But not a flower I’d choose;  
 Nor yet the Canterbury bell –  
 I never cared for blues.”  
 And so it criticized each flower,  
 This supercilious seed,  
 Until it woke one summer morn,  
 And found itself – a weed.

•SLIDE #: Words Are Powerful Things. Be Careful What You Say And How You Say It.

Charles Swindoll wrote about a woman who committed suicide. She left an unfinished note that simply read,

•SLIDE #: “They said...” She never completed her final thought, but whatever “they said” was painful enough for her to extinguish her own life.

•SLIDE #: Though sticks and stones inflict great pain  
 Their hurt will fade away;  
 But just one sharp and biting word

Brings harm that comes to stay.

- SLIDE #: Timing is sometimes more important than truth.

The right thing at the wrong time is as devastating as the wrong thing at the right time.  
We want to say the right thing at the right time.

- SLIDE #: You may not know as much about what is going on as you think you do.

A grocery store checkout clerk once wrote to advise columnist Ann Landers to complain that she had seen people buy “luxury” food items – like birthday cakes and bags of shrimp – with their food stamps. The writer went on to say that she thought all those people on welfare who treated themselves to such non-necessities were “lazy and wasteful”.

A few weeks later Landers’ column was devoted entirely to people who had responded to the grocery clerk. One woman wrote:

I didn’t buy a cake, but I did buy a big bag of shrimp with food stamps. My husband had been working at a plant for fifteen years when it shut down. The shrimp casserole I made was for our wedding-anniversary dinner and lasted three days. Perhaps the grocery store clerk who criticized that would have a different view of life after walking in my shoes.

Another woman wrote: I’m the woman who bought the \$17 cake and paid for it with food stamps. I thought the checkout woman in the store would burn a hole through me with her eyes.

What she didn’t know is the cake was for me little girl’s birthday. It will be her last. She has bone cancer and will probably be gone within six to eight months.

You never know what other people are dealing with.

- SLIDE #: “Great is the man who can accept criticism. Greater yet is he who welcomes it. But greatest of all is he who knows how to administer it in a spirit of love and sensitivity without causing pain or chagrin.”  
(Rabbi Norman Lamm)